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ABSTRACT

Operating on the assumption that good middle schools differ significantly from other schools and that the differences should be identifiable by a disinterested observer, the author of this document visited 39 schools and attended 3 conferences to learn at first hand the characteristics of good middle schools and to identify the practices that made them good. The product of this informal study is a listing of 33 characteristics of good schools and 270 ideas or practices used in the schools in such processes as administration, instruction, curriculum planning, gaining student involvement, maintaining good community relations, and obtaining funding. The author offers specific recommendations to state departments of education, local school districts, and administrators at the school building level. (PGD)

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GOOD SCHOOLS FOR MIDDLE GRADE YOUNGSTERS: CHARACTERISTICS, PRACTICES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

The publication of this document, Good Schools for Middle Grade Youngsters, provides continuing evidence of the commitment made by the National Middle School Association to provide maximum service to its membership. A copy of this publication will be sent to each 1978 member of the National Middle School Association as a benefit of his/her membership.

Additional copies of this publication may be secured from the national office of the association. Please send inquiries to: Dr. Hal D. Gaddis, Executive Director, National Middle School Association, P. O. Box 968, Fairborn, Ohio 45324.

The National Middle School Association wishes to extend sincere thanks to Mr. William Morrison, for granting permission to publish this report. It is viewed as having great value in terms of content, since it is a compilation of materials assembled following extensive travel to provide a realistic review of current middle school practices. Readers are urged to retain the proper perspective concerning the reason for the undertaking of this project. Although written for evaluation purposes in a particular middle school, it is felt that the format and content can be used by those interested in undertaking a similar self-study in their local school setting.

Very little editing was done in the preparation of this report for publication. It was felt that such a practice might detract from the original intent of the study or alter the significance of the materials contained therein.

Robert M. Malinka
Publications Committee
National Middle School
Association

INTRODUCTION

The following material is a condensation of a sabbatical leave project based on visits to about forty schools during the 1975-76 school year. It was prepared as an individual contribution to the total evaluation study of the writer's own school, undertaken by the staff at that time. The hope was that it would serve as a useful reference in assessing past performance and, also, provide some direction for the future.

Schools selected were probably a representative sample of eastern schools having some combination of students in grades five through nine. Their involvement in current middle school philosophy and practice ranged from lon-term to practically none. Topics chosen for inclusion in this report were determined by personal preference.

Section I attempts to identify significant characteristics of more successful schools. No explanation or defense of these is included in the document.

Section II suggests the range of ideas and practices developed by educators to better serve middle grade students. At best, it represents only a small fraction of the "good things" happening in various schools.

Section III offers recommendations from the writer for consideration by others interested in promoting successful middle school education.

Section IV provides a concluding statement by the writer of the document.

Section V provides a listing of the schools which were visited by the writer in his attempt to secure data for inclusion in this report.

William Morrison
Bethlehem Middle School
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I. CHARACTERISTICS

Two basic assumptions of this project have been that (1) good middle schools are different in significant ways from other schools, and (2) that these differences should be identifiable by a disinterested observer. Once determined, these could be used effectively as one portion of an instrument for self-evaluation by any school.

The list that follows is not intended to encompass all traits that good schools have; rather it includes those features which the author felt personally were important in the schools being observed. The statements are summary in nature, since the author plans to report orally to the Board of Education, and to the faculty of the middle school, at which time details and explanations will be added.

Obviously, not all schools exhibit all listed characteristics. Better schools, however, display more of these qualities.

Good schools for middle grade youngsters:

1. Are individually unique.
   Rather than fitting a common mold, they reflect to a major degree the values and personality of the principal.

2. Exist for the benefit of students.
   What's "good for kids" gets priority over such concerns as administrative and teacher convenience, curriculum, and traditional practices.

3. Make extensive use of the findings of research concerning the nature and needs of students.
   Programs are designed to try to meet those needs.

4. Practice what they preach.
   There is an obvious correlation between what is stated in the handbook and what is actually happening in the class.

5. Are oriented toward people.
   How students and adults feel about themselves is important. Trust and respect are in evidence, and individuality is encouraged.

6. Are open to people and ideas.
   Parental involvement and support is actively encouraged. Staff ideas are solicited and needed. Input is also gained from active participation in middle school associations and current literature.

7. Inhabit a variety of physical plants.
   Space arrangements usually provide for large-group open spaces, smaller classroom areas, and relatively confined spaces for small group and individual work. Space is often adaptable.

8. View education in broad terms.

   It is not restricted by test, class, or even school. Curriculum programs are constructed from a blending of commercial materials, borrowed practices, and original ideas. Community resources are used. This may be accomplished by bringing people with special skills or interests into the school and/or providing opportunities for students to be directly involved with community facilities.

9. Lead, rather than follow, their communities.
   They hold strong beliefs regarding the benefits to students of their programs and work hard to sell their ideas.

10. Focus on the development of basic skills.
    Curriculum content provides the vehicle. Reading, language skills, and math are emphasized. Pre-tests are common, and individual lessons are often prescribed for diagnosed weaknesses.

11. Recognize that learning is an individual process.
    Much individual attention is given, often within individualized or small-group activities. Groupings that occur tend to be temporary and based on student needs. Individualized programs appear most often in math and reading.

12. Involve many people in the direct teaching process.
    Among those involved are teachers, aides, volunteers, student teachers, and student tutors.

13. Foster growth toward independence in learning.
    Opportunities are provided for students to initiate investigations and projects. Learning contracts are common.

14. Are concerned with the development of attitudes and values.
    Time and programs are often available for this purpose. Guidance personnel and other teachers are usually involved.

15. Organize their teachers in cooperative units.
    Interdisciplinary teams are found most often, but disciplinary teams also exist.

16. Provide different organizational structures for the lower grade(s) in school.
In grades five and six, students may spend more time with fewer teachers. Some self-contained classes occur.

17. Offer opportunities for some multi-grade experiences.
These may be planned by team assignment, common skill levels, interest groups, or cafeteria scheduling.

18. Encourage the exploration of many cultural areas.
Extensive selections of clubs, mini-courses, and related arts courses are available to students, usually in response to their interests.

19. Are often the "creation" of a single person.
Middle schools have come into being often for reasons other than educational. Good schools, however, have taken advantage of the opportunity to examine past practices and to project new and improved programs into their new organization. Often the Superintendent has selected the original principal and given him a relatively free hand to design the program and to select the staff.

20. Receive effective leadership from their principals.
This is one of the few essential ingredients of a successful school. More than anyone, the principal controls the atmosphere, the direction, and the involvement of teachers, parents, and students in the life of the school. More often than not he has had some elementary experience, and has chosen to work at the middle grade level. Few women hold this position.

21. Have principals who see their primary role as that of educational leader.
They are much involved in helping teachers teach, by providing ideas, materials, and time. Teacher observation and supervision are important responsibilities. Close touch is maintained with the total curriculum.

22. Involve staff members in the decision making process.
Such decisions may include curriculum, time use, team organization, and hiring of personnel. Efficient communication procedures are in operation.

23. Select staff members to fit the total program.
Qualities valued include: a deep interest in students of this age group, a sense of humor, creativity, flexibility, and commitment to the philosophy of the school. Elementary experience is often preferred.

24. Contain a well equipped and adequately staffed media center.
This is viewed as a necessary ingredient of the total program and is utilized extensively during the entire day.

25. Display many examples of student work throughout the building.

26. Have made generous use of special state and federal fundings.
New programs have often been initiated with this type of assistance.

27. Have provided necessary pre-service and in-service programs for their staffs.

28. Show a healthy irreverence toward restrictive regulations of county or state.
Conflicts are noted in areas such as funding, supervision, and certification, since middle schools are not usually recognized as unique entities. What is considered best for students may take precedence.

29. Admit they don't have all the answers.
However, they are actively engaged in looking for solutions and better ways. An element of dissatisfaction with present organization, programs, or building utilization may be present.

30. Seem most exciting, innovative, and probably successful during their formative years.
There is a tendency to "let down" when the original design of the school has been achieved.

31. Have less vandalism and fewer behavior problems.
Kids seem to feel good about this kind of school and probably have fewer frustrations to vent. Average daily attendance ranges from 95% to 98%.

32. Usually have an active student group or council.
It functions most often in planning social, recreational, and service events for the student body. Membership is open to all grade levels, but leadership may be reserved for upper grade students. Items of student concern may be channeled through this group. The administration believes it is a significant and useful organization in the life of the school.

33. Showed varied supervisory practices in curriculum areas.
Responsibility is usually assigned to a "house leader," "department head," or "coordinator," who may also teach one or more classes. It is not uncommon for this person to supervise two of the major academic disciplines. His duties are most often within the school, rather than extending to elementary or high school levels.

II. PRACTICES

Schools for middle grade youngsters differ markedly in a great many aspects: grades included, philosophy, organizational patterns, staff utilization, personality and background of administrators, parent involvement, and facilities available. As a consequence, individual practices also vary widely.

The following enumeration of specific things that schools do suggests a wide range of possibilities open to middle grade educators. One should keep in mind, however, that each idea or action may be effective in a particular setting, with certain students, at a given time, and under the guidance of some type or combination of staff. The intent here is simply to expose a diversity of ideas.

District

1. Students and parents serve on district and school committees.
2. School "critics" are encouraged to join school committees.
3. District wide policy committee is composed of central administration, building administrators, and teacher representatives, and sets district policy.
4. District provides a contract option; teachers may elect to work beyond the minimum period to conduct enrichment activities or to do curriculum study.
5. District provides one-half time teacher for gifted education program.
6. District provides a part-time K-12 interdisciplinary advocate to encourage interrelatedness of programs.
7. District provides a full-time, permanent substitute who may teach any class or be available to assist where needed. Advantages are that he/she knows the students and the programs.
8. PTA coordinates the volunteer program for the entire district.

Administration

1. Principal tries to be involved where the students are: halls, classes, cafeteria, gym, library, clubs, and after school activities. He/she knows many by name.

2. Hall door to principal's office is usually open. Students and teachers do not need to go through the secretary.

3. Leadership team composed of administrators and team leaders makes school decisions.

4. Administrative offices are decentralized for more effective interaction with students and teachers.

5. Principal's office equipped with lounging furniture.

6. Principal conducts an annual evaluation of school, deriving input from students, parents, and teachers.

7. Principal submits an annual report to parents, highlighting goals and accomplishments of past year and indicating plans for coming year.

8. Leadership cabinet meets bi-weekly with principal to exchange ideas and get feed-back from staff.

9. School discipline committee composed of principal, teachers, parents, and students studies problem areas and recommends corrective action.

10. Principal meets weekly with teams.

11. Principal includes parental participation in staff hiring process.

12. Principal places high value on staff morale. He/she works to cultivate it.

13. Principal uses skill-oriented curriculum guide as basic reference when observing and evaluating teachers.

14. School requires parents to pay for vandalism done by students. Legal action may be instituted.

15. Study carrels in office area or hall are used for in-school suspension.

16. Home suspension used only as a "last resort."

17. Noon-hour detention is available as an alternative to after-school detention.

18. Principal encourages staff to try new ideas; failure is allowed.

19. Birthdays of students and staff are recognized on daily bulletin or P.A. system. Card, cupcake, or candy bar is given.

20. School and class rules are displayed in building.

21. Belt walkie-talkies are used by principal to maintain contact with office.

22. Principal occasionally announces suspension of regular schedule to allow for time of brief recreational and social activities. This is reward for good behavior.

23. Graph of average daily attendance is posted in main hall.

24. Students are "hired" to clean cafeteria. "Pay" is lunch, soda, or ice cream.

Environment (Physical)

1. Portable room dividers can be used to provide "closed" area.

2. Houses have separate dining areas, which reduces congestion and noise.

3. Each team area consists of a large room, open space, a closed classroom, and a room for small groups.

4. Rest rooms are labeled "Young Ladies" and "Young Gentlemen."

5. English-social studies resource room provides storage and a place for meeting and browsing.

6. Math lab contains school's math materials and working areas for students and teachers.

7. Skills centers or clinics for major academic subjects are provided.

8. Learning centers contain some casual furniture.

Environment (Personal)

1. All adults working in building are included in school social and recreational activities.

2. Recorded music is piped into halls, media center, and cafeteria.

3. Television shows are on during lunchtime in the cafeteria.

4. Students who arrive at school early may go to the gym for social and recreational activities or to the library for reading.

5. All adults in the building assume responsibility for hall supervision of all students.

6. "Secret Santas" provide daily surprises for chosen partners during pre-holiday season. Names are drawn from a hat.

Guidance

1. Each incoming student and his parent have a joint conference with a counselor in the early fall.

2. Each 8th grade student and his parents have a conference to discuss high school programs.

3. Personal folders and report cards may be shared with students prior to parent conference.

4. Seventh grade students examine personal folders as part of their guidance program.

5. Personal folders are checked by the principal before students go on to high school. Materials may be removed so students can "make a new start."

6. Office is "off limits" one period per day.

7. Home room period is extended on a regular schedule as an advisory period.

8. Most student counseling is done "in the field" rather than in the office.

9. Guidance "rap" sessions may involve mixed grades, with topics drawn from community needs, i.e., divorce, drugs, alcoholism, etc. Volunteer teachers trained by counselors serve as "reflectors."

10. Values clarification is a part of the 9th grade life education course.

11. Counselors teach units such as: "Home," "Family," "Growth," "Personality," "Yourself," and "Family Problems."

12. Trained high school students serve as peer counselors for middle school students, focusing on school adjustment problems.

Scheduling

1. Teams are assigned blocks of time to be divided as they see the need.

2. School operates on a six day cycle.

3. Academic classes meet four times per week.

4. Morning classes are longer than afternoon classes.

5. Math and science classes are longer.

6. The school day is 2/3 academic time and 1/3 non-academic (exploratories, etc.)

7. Students with special needs may be scheduled for additional time in gym, shop, art, etc.

8. No study halls are scheduled.

9. Exploratory art blocks are 4½ weeks in length.

10. The team schedules its own daily period for team business, social event, or "break" for students.

Grouping

1. Teams and classes have mixed 5th and 6th grade students.

2. Teams and classes have mixed 7th and 8th grade students.

3. Homerooms are comprised of students in grades 7-8-9.

4. Each grade level has one self-contained classroom.

5. Language arts classes are multi-aged based on skill needs of students.

6. Classes are non-graded except for math and foreign language.

7. Students remain in the same house for three years.

8. Teams are organized around "outdoor education" theme. Kids may select the theme.

9. Alternative program involves twenty "able" students and twenty "problem" students working with two teachers on individual skills and group projects.

10. Students may cross teams for certain courses.

11. A special team is composed of 7th and 8th graders who have low skills, weak motivation, and/or patterns of disruptive behavior. Students may enter or leave the group as performance dictates.

12. The school is attempting to group students in terms of composite evaluation, including academic skills, physical development, and social and emotional maturity.

13. A special program for non-involved, disruptive students will provide remedial academic, emotional, social, and physical experiences in an environment isolated from other students.

Instruction

1. Teachers teach units at all grade levels, 6,7,8.

2. Teachers select organizational patterns, and options include: self-contained, 2 person team, 3 person team, 4 person team.

3. All 6th grade teachers, except math, teach reading one period per day.

4. All classroom teachers teach four basic disciplines to homeroom groups during the first few weeks of school. Later they may group students as they wish.

5. School policy restricts lecturing by teachers to a maximum of 10% of the class time.

6. Program for academically gifted students meets twice weekly and focuses on thinking skills.

7. Some 8th grade students have ½-day work-study option.

8. Potential drop-outs have a shortened academic schedule and spend two hours daily in special trades programs.

9. The science program is semi-individualized; groups of 3 - 5 students work as a unit.

10. Art and shop teachers volunteer extra time to work with students in educationally retarded class.

Team Teaching

1. The school encourages many activities to build team identity and spirit.

2. Time blocks are scheduled by the school to be used in interdisciplinary units.

3. A school goal is to achieve 50% time use for interdisciplinary studies.

4. A ninth grade team is organizing a year-long program around the theme "The Future."

5. Teams consist of reading, language arts, social studies, and foreign language teachers. Math and science are organized as disciplinary teams.

6. Teams consist of 2 English, 2 science, and 2 social studies teachers. Math teachers operate as a disciplinary team.

7. Disciplinary teams in language arts, science, and social studies divide curriculum into small units. Teachers teach units in which they have strength or interest. Units may be repeated.

8. Team teachers teach two content areas and reading.

9. Teachers select subject(s) they wish to teach.

10. Team units contain built-in activities to share with parents.

11. Two teachers teach an art and music history course.

12. Team teachers are involved in the hiring of replacements for their team.

13. A non-graded 6-8 team is composed of underachievers of average ability.

14. A non-graded 6-8 team is composed of students with learning difficulties.

15. Sixth grade unified arts are organized in an interdisciplinary program.

16. Teams may plan recess period for students.

Interdisciplinary Units

1. Futuristics
2. Family
3. Careers
4. Science Fiction
5. Current World Problems
6. The Population Problem
7. Philadelphia Cyclorama
8. A Unity Feast (Bicentennial)
9. A Tale of Two Countries (Bicentennial)
10. Survival
11. Prejudice
12. Conventions
13. Poetry
14. Sports
15. Movies
16. Consumerisn
17. The Community
18. Of Mice and Men
19. Humor

Curriculum - General

1. Curriculum is "always in motion." Evaluation is on-going by teachers, supervisors, and administrators.

2. District Curriculum Council consisting of Assistant Superintendent, principals, teachers and parents approve major curriculum changes in district.

3. In exploratory areas, teaching is oriented for "exposure," not mastery.

4. To reduce dependence on a single text, school policy restricts book orders to a maximum of thirty per title. A variety of levels is also required.

Subject Areas

Art

1. Art students are painting permanent Bicentennial murals on corridor walls.
2. Students decorate individual ceiling tiles.
3. Individual students may design and paint one cement block in hallway. Signs name and date.
4. Classes silk-screen monthly calendars for offices and classrooms.
5. Three year art program is fully individualized around themes of color, line, texture, form, etc.
6. Community resource people are involved in the art program.
7. Eighth grade program is developed through an independent study approach.

Foreign Language

1. Sixth graders receive nine weeks exploratory exposure to language.

Health

1. "Family Life" unit is taught in three week segments, one at each grade level, 6,7,8.
2. Evening parent meeting is scheduled to allow for the previewing of "Family Life" course and materials.

Home Economics

1. The program is individualized.

Industrial Arts

1. Students may check out tools for home use to continue projects.
2. Shop duty roster is posted. Titles include: Shop Foreman, Safety Director, Public Relations, Maintenance. Duties rotate.

3. Shop safety record is posted.
4. Students build table hockey games.
5. Students built display case for projects, to be used in cafeteria when lunch is finished.
6. Eighth grade classes constructed full size model of lunar rover.
7. Sixth grade classes built full size garden shed as a part of career education program.

Math

1. Top group operates in continuous progress program; other students work together in structured class.

Music

1. All sixth graders review instruction in guitar.
2. Guitars may be checked out for overnight use.
3. Department produces a major musical annually.
4. Some performing groups meet before school.

Physical Education

1. Remedial physical education class meets twice weekly under joint direction of gym teacher and guidance counselor.
2. Orienteering course is offered as an option.
3. Neighborhood facilities - pool, tennis courts, archery range, etc., - available for school use.
4. Aides operate swimming program.
5. Many gym classes, intramurals, and some inter-scholastic activities are co-ed.
6. Leaders Club is used to aid in skill instruction.
7. Hall areas serve as supplementary stations for activities such as tumbling.
8. Emphasis of program is on IDS (Individual and Dual Sports), rather than on team sports.

Science

1. Students summarize one article weekly from current science periodicals.

Reading

1. All seventh and eighth graders receive a five week course in developmental reading.
2. Teachers us current sheet music, auto manuals, etc., as reading materials.
3. Reading is offered as an option.
4. The reading clinic serves as an enrichment center, as well as a remedial area.

Independent Study

1. Independent study option is available to any responsible student. A contract is required, and the student is involved in scheduling time.
2. A student may elect to spend part of his day in a town-sponsored program at the nature center. A town minibus provides transportation.
3. The school provides an independent study room, well equipped and staffed. It is open to students throughout the day.
4. Some students are involved in an urban investigation stay at the YMCA while gathering their information.
5. Parental permission is needed to enroll in the independent study program. The duration may be from one week to a full semester.

Career Education

1. The school has organized a "Career Week" program.
2. Eighth graders are involved in an "Education for Employment" program. Students spend some time in classroom instruction and then are involved in direct contact with a community institution or business. Grades are given for work experience. Some students receive pay. Group size is limited by available placement.

3. Eighth graders organize a student corporation to design, manufacture, advertise, and sell a useful product. Business procedures are followed.

Outdoor Education

1. A local pond and swamp area are made available for school use.
2. Sixth graders attend a conservation camp.
3. Seventh and eighth graders participate in a three to four day wilderness survival trip.
4. Seventh graders camp at Cape Cod for a week.
5. An Outdoor Club schedules one overnight camping experience monthly.
6. Seventh graders participate in an Action Program, similar to "Outward Bound."
7. Students spend a week at a seashore area for their outdoors studies.

Student Involvement

1. Students select exploratory arts courses.
2. Students select academic courses from descriptions prepared by teachers. Some courses are open to all students; others have prior requirements or are restricted to certain grade levels. General guidelines exist.
3. Students undertook extensive clean-up and restoration of an urban neighborhood street.
4. Students may elect to be present during a parent-teacher conference.
5. Basic Skills students operate a "deli," preparing and selling sandwiches to staff.
6. Students serve as office receptionists during the secretary's lunch period.
7. Students serve as nursery school assistants.

8. Responsible students enjoy greater freedom of movement within the building. Responsibility Pass enables the student to be in the student lounge.

9. Student representatives serve on the school and district committees.

10. Students serve as hosts and guides for visitors and assist with orientation for elementary students.

11. Students may use many office and audio-visual machines when preparing projects.

12. Posters showing student rights and responsibilities are displayed in the halls.

13. Cafeteria tables have assigned "captains" in charge of clean-up. Duty rotates.

14. The Student Council plans recreational, social and service activities for the student body. These may occur during the school day, after school, or in the evening. Activities are geared to the appropriate age levels.

15. An Executive Committee of the student council decides meeting times. Members are responsible to notify teachers and to stagger meeting times.

16. The Council is preparing a position paper on "Freedom and Responsibility" for the students.

17. High School student council members help train middle school council members.

18. The students chose ot organize a student government composed of students, teacher representatives and two parents. The chairperson will be a student.

19. Students plan, prepare, and film television shows for school use.

20. Students prepare and present a morning television program including opening activities, news, announcements, and weather.

21. Students conduct a bi-weekly news quiz on school television.

22. Students present "Bicentennial Minutes" on the P. A. system daily.

23. Students announce daily bus arrivals at the close of school.

24. Students take pictures for the school paper.

25. Student audio-visual assistants may elect to miss related arts and spend more time in the audio-visual area.

26. Sixth grade students and their parents select four exploratory courses from the choices available.

Library - Media Center

1. Provides space for classroom instruction, audio-visual materials storage, viewing and listening areas, conferences, professional library, study carrels, and a teacher preparation area.

2. The Librarian sets up interest centers and special features areas.

3. A commercial copier is available for student and staff use.

4. All audio-visual software is listed in the card catalog.

5. The card catalog is color coded to identify types of materials: books, film strips, transparencies, tapes, etc.

6. Students may sign out any portable audio-visual equipment and software for overnight use. Parental permission is required.

7. An audio-visual specialist is available to assist students and teachers with project materials.

8. Para-professional research assistant is available to students and teachers.

9. All students receive instruction in library skills.

10. The reading teacher alerts the librarian as to students requiring help with library skills.

11. The librarian prepared a slide-tape presentation of basic library skills to be used by the classroom teachers.

12. A "scavenger hunt" game is used to check the students' knowledge of library skills.

13. The librarian gives book talks in classrooms to encourage recreational reading.

14. The librarian and vice-principal collaborated in setting up a "Quest" enrichment activity center in the library.

15. Copies of subject area tests, worksheets, and other written materials are filed in a special area for reference use by other teachers.

16. Media aides video tape evening television programs for day use in the school.

17. One-half of the annual book orders must come from recommendations made by other teachers.

18. Lounge furniture is provided in "pleasure reading" areas.

Clubs - Activities - Mini-Courses

1. All programs are open to all students.

2. Parent volunteers and community experts conduct, or assist in, programs.

3. Parent groups organize and operate enrichment activities for small groups of students during the regular school day. Students sign up, if interested.

4. The first period of the day is set aside for "special instruction."

5. Surveys are used to determine student and faculty interests before the schedule of possible activities is prepared.

6. All adult staff members are involved.

7. One half of the staff is involved in each three to four week session.

8. The district funds a wide variety of after-school activities. Offerings are based on student interests.

9. The school sponsors a student-teacher-parent talent show.

10. The PTA funds an annual ice cream social.

11. The school facilities are used for "fun night" activities.

12. A late afternoon roller skating party is held.

13. The school sponsors "Aqua Night" fun activities.

Reporting to Parents

1. Teams schedule an individual conference with the parents. A parent may opt not to come.
2. Conferences involve the student, teacher, and parents.
3. The student "runs" the conference with parents and teachers.
4. The team invites parents for coffee and a program description during the team planning period.
5. If needed, the team may arrange for early evening conference time for parents.
6. The school is open "anytime" to parents and other interested persons.
7. The Principal schedules weekly coffees with interested parents to exchange concerns.
8. The Principal invites representatives of parent groups, business, and community to a weeky luncheon in the cafeteria, followed by visits to classes.
9. One evening weekly, the Principal, and other administrators, are available for "hot line" calls.
10. Teachers make three "positive-comment" phone calls per week.
11. All PTA meetings include student participation and business items.
12. Teams may select time and form to be used when reporting.
13. Grades in exploratory arts and electives are "pass-fail." Skill evaluation sheets may be included.
14. Reports include brief content summaries and anecdoted comments.
15. Report forms match the color of the house name (red, white, blue)
16. The team may send home a "spotlight" form, recognizing particular student successes.

Articulation

1. The district provides in-service time for philosophical and curricular exchanges.

2. The district has organized articulation committees at the three school levels to foster communication and understanding.

3. The Principal believes that articulation with the high school is important, and he works consciously to develop it.

4. High school teachers visit the middle school to talk about programs offered at the ninth grade level.

5. The high school has adopted the middle school "house" concept.

6. High school students provide assistance to middle school teachers and students.

7. Advanced middle school students may take selected courses at the high school.

8. Middle school students may be enrolled in high school during the year, instead of waiting until September.

9. The middle school Principal meets annually with grade four teachers in the district. Each teacher divides her class into three equal groups, which will feed into the three middle school "houses." (Incoming middle school group is grade five)

10. The high school offers a course in elementary and middle school tutoring.

11. Middle school students answer elementary school "letters to Santa."

In-Service Education

1. The district provides day(s) and buses to enable groups of teachers to observe programs in other area schools.

2. The district provides on-going programs of mini-courses and speakers on topics of educational and general interest to staff.

3. The district funds one or two college level courses each semester for interested staff.

4. Articles of current educational interest are placed in individual folders in the teachers lounge.

Staffing

1. The team decides on how its aide will be used.
2. Resource teacher is available to provide additional help in academic areas.
3. Senior citizens serve as school and classroom aides. The district provides transportation and lunch. The program is extremely effective for both groups.
4. Older middle school students tutor younger middle school and elementary students.
5. High school students tutor middle school students in both academic subjects and classes for students having special needs.

State or Federally Funded Projects

1. A reading clinic was established to provide remedial and enrichment activities.
2. The basic designs of a new school and program were developed.
3. Building renovations are being made in a continuing program.
4. Media centers were planned and equipped.
5. A program was developed using the school store as an academic resource.
6. A program for gifted students was instituted.
7. Teachers received training in middle school programs.
8. A program for potential "drop-outs" was started.
9. A volunteer resource file was set up.
10. An urban neighborhood restoration project was completed.
11. Career education programs were designed.
12. A program for disruptive students was developed.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Middle grade schools share a number of common goals with the schools that precede and follow them. Many of the recommendations in this section relate to widely accepted beliefs that schools have responsibilities to prepare students to be effective and independent learners, to guide them to become responsible citizens, and to assist them in developing feelings of self-worth. Many, also, focus specifically on aspects of the writer's present school situation.

Obviously, the implementation of any suggestion will be dependent upon subsequent study and decision making by other interested persons. The intent, here, is to identify elements in the existing program that should be examined and to propose additions thereto, so that school organization and function are more consistent with recognized middle school philosophy.

State Department of Education

1. Requirements for certification of middle grade teachers and administrators should be developed by the New York Department of Education.

The present practice of designating grade six as elementary and grades seven and eight as secondary is impeding the successful development of cohesive middle schools that adopt the most common organizational pattern of combining grades 6-8.

It brings together conflicting attitudes and expectations which are seldom resolved on the basis of what is best for middle grade students. There is much agreement that the middle school years represent a unique and significant period in the life of a child. There is considerably less agreement that the educational experience offered the student at this time should also be different from what has gone on before, or what will follow after. A few states have already recognized the need to make available to middle schools the specialized staffs they require for maximum effectiveness. New York should do likewise.

2. Programs to prepare middle grade teachers should be developed by teacher training institutions in the state.

Few, if any, teachers currently involved in the education of middle grade youngsters in New York have been specifically trained to do what they are being asked to do. Team teaching, individualization, guidance, independent study, and other

attributes of middle school philosophy have probably received little emphasis during the teacher's professional preparation.

If the middle years are transitional between the elementary and high school periods, then teacher education programs at this level should include the necessary traditional components from both areas, as well as experiences unique to the middle school concept. It has become obvious that not every teacher, now assigned to the middle grades, can successfully implement the program deemed most suitable for the child entering adolescence. Programs need to be started that will identify, nurture, and train those individuals who can. The University of the State of New York should provide the leadership.

3. Pre-service and in-service education programs for middle grade teachers should be initiated by the New York State Department of Education.

In view of the limited, specialized training available to teachers assigned to middle schools, individual schools have undertaken the task of providing some degree of re-orientation or re-training for their staffs. Better schools seem to have done this more effectively.

To expand and equalize the benefits to teachers and students, the Department of Education should utilize its vast resources and personnel to develop and conduct a series of workshop experiences designed to acquaint participants with middle school theory and practice. This would provide any school in the state with access to the expert information needed to initiate or improve such a program.

Local School District

1. In joint sponsorship with the Bethlehem Central Teachers' Association, the Bethlehem Central School District should initiate a dispassionate study of the cumulative effects of the contract negotiating process on the total educational program within the district.

As a consequence of the enactment of the Taylor Law, significant changes have occurred in the educational life of the district, some of which have been detrimental to the education of children. An impartial examination of past procedures and results might help avoid some pitfalls which may lie ahead.

2. The Board of Education should reaffirm its commitment to a middle school educational program for students in grades 6-8.

Of the options open to students in the middle grades, a program designed in harmony with current middle school philosophy and implemented by a staff committed to its principles, seems best able to meet their needs and interests.

3. To provide short-term and long-range inflow of ideas concerning middle school practices, the district should organize and fund a continuing leave program.

Successful schools benefit from constant exposure to new ideas and techniques. Visitation to other schools has proven to be an efficient means of gathering these. It would be advantageous to the district and the school to have a number of teachers relieved of their regular assignments, one at a time for a period of a week, so they could serve as "collectors" for the staff. Maximum gains would accrue if the program could begin promptly. Once the present evaluation study is completed, the number of teachers involved could be sharply curtailed, although the program should be continued.

Provision should also be made so the building Principal is afforded a similar opportunity. Money currently budgeted for staff conferences could be allocated to this program instead.

4. The district should take the lead in organizing a Capital District Middle School Forum.

At present there is no regional association which has as its primary function the dissemination of information specifically pertinent to middle school educators, and from which they can draw support and encouragement. Bethlehem could stimulate the growth of such an organization. The Virginia Middle School Forum could be used as a model.

5. To assist staff members in becoming more skilled in middle school operation, a series of in-service workshops should be developed and funded by the district.

Since teachers, supervisors, and administrators have had little or no formal instruction in middle school theory or practice, the whole gamut of experiences could be included. Visits to successful schools should be one phase of the program.

6. Some modification of the existing building structure should be considered.

Not all activites have similar space requirements, and not all students and teachers function most efficiently in the same environments. Ideally, academic teams should have available to them a large, open area, at least one traditional classroom-type area, and some combination of smaller areas for individual and small-group activities. A comprehensive examination of the present structure and its adaptability should be made.

7. To insure a fair and comprehensive examination of ideas that originate in the district, a district-wide "Ideas Evaluation Committee" should be formed.

New ideas are rather fragile things, and, often, first exposures are critical concerning their acceptance or demise. To protect and encourage the growth of educational thought, ideas related to any aspect of the total district program could be submitted to a standing committee composed of representatives of administrators, supervisors, teachers, parents, and students. It would be the task of the committee to determine if an idea has merit and, if so, how it could best be fed into the system.

8. It should be a district policy to include parent and student representation on district and school committees.

Both groups are vitally affected by decisions made at district, and school level. Their input would broaden the perspectives of the professional staff, enrich the total program, and enhance communication among all of the groups involved.

9. At the district level, someone should be assigned to keep school administrators and teachers informed as to special funding available through state and federal programs.

Other middle schools have been recipients of additional funds which have been used for a variety of constructive purposes, ranging from building construction and renovation, to developing programs for students with special needs, to providing in-service opportunities for teachers. Unfortunately, becuse of current financial conditions, less money is probably now available through these channels.

10. At all grade levels, greater emphasis should be placed on nurturing the individuality and uniqueness of each student.

Typically, schools place a high value on conformity and uniformity, while diversity and individuality tend to be discouraged. Beyond a minimum level required for safety and

consideration for the rights of others, school expectations should promote individual thought and deed, as fully as is possible and practical. Now, and in the forseeable future, society will depend on the creative ideas of individual citizens.

Building Level

1. As a faculty and staff, we should welcome the evaluation process we are engaged in, recognizing the opportunity it affords us to look closely at the total program and to recommend changes believed desirable.

Social institutions are highly resistant to change, and schools, certainly, are not exceptions. Typically, when faced with the need for evaluation, the response tends to be to "go through the motions," or to "lie low until the storm passes," and then resume operations as they were before. Good schools, however, when faced with changes brought on through the evaluation process, or mandated by desegregation or by fluctuating enrollments or by need for additional space, have usually responded constructively, sensing this as a challenge rather than a threat.

2. We need to cultivate a distinct middle school identity.

All too often middle schools, and the junior high schools which preceded them, have mimicked the high school in organization and practice, paying little heed to the nature or the needs of their learners. Current middle school philosophy, as well as the original rationale for the junior high, promotes the uniqueness of the middle grader and his right to an educational program that is different from that of the elementary or high school. We should look more to other middle schools when we need outside help solving our problems, and resist ideas from any source which are inconsistent with what is best for students of this age.

3. We should avail ourselves of the many resources which define and promote the middle school concept.

Since no one on the present staff has been trained as a middle school teacher, the school should acquire an extensive library of printed and audio-visual materials to be used as aids in continuing in-service education. We should subscribe to periodical literature that is accessible and be actively represented in organizations such as the National Middle School Association. Without such input our vision and performance will be seriously restricted.

Building Level - Organization

1. An investigation to determine the feasibility of reorganizing the student body (1100 plus) into separate "houses" should be undertaken.

In an attempt to make school a more personal experience for students, schools with large enrollments are usually sub-divided into several smaller units, each having its own academic faculty, guidance counselor, administrative leader, and space within the building. Pupil-teacher relationships are augmented by this arrangement, and administrative problems are decreased. This type of pattern is found in older buildings, as well as in newer structures designed for this purpose.

2. The organizational structure of the sixth grade should be changed.

If the middle school is to really be a transitional school, then the lowest grade (grade 6 in this school) should more closely approximate the structure of the elementary school, and the highest grade (grade 8 in this school) should be more reflective of the high school model.

To diminish the impact of the move from a basically self-contained classroom approach to the highly departmentalized concept of the secondary school, a modified organizational arrangement for sixth grade students is needed. This might include provision for some self-contained experience, and/or less formal teaming of several teachers who would be responsible for the academic instruction. Problems of adjustment for incoming students would be considerably lessened.

3. The basic organization of the school into grade level teams should be evaluated.

The pattern of team organization comprising one teacher from four basic disciplines is probably the one most common in middle schools. However, other variations of interdisciplinary and disciplinary teams exist successfully, in both graded and multi-graded versions. It is not uncommon for schools to have tried other arrangements before adopting their present plans.

4. A special program for disruptive students should be designed.

Enormous quantities of administrator, counselor, and teacher time and energy are expended on behalf of a very small number of students who do not "fit" the existing program and, consequently are prone to display their

disinterest in very obvious ways. It would be beneficial to all parties concerned if an alternative program were available that would remove them partly, or completely, from the regular school expectations until they were more able to cope with them. Prospect Heights Middle School and Rhodes Middle School (Virginia and Pennsylvania respectively) have differing strategies focused on this type of student and his particular needs.

5. The possibility of assigning homeroom students to a larger share of the faculty should be investigated.

Traditionally, homeroom groups of students have been given to teachers of academic subjects only. In light of the strong emphasis on teacher participation in the guidance function espoused by middle school philosophy, distribution of the total student body between more adults would facilitate communication appreciably. Use could be made of art, music, shop, health, and home economics rooms and staff.

6. The number of study halls should be curtailed or eliminated.

One of the original recommendations of the committee that planned the present school was that traditional study halls should not be scheduled. The rationale was that such use of student time is generally unproductive, and, invariably, students least able to profit from such placements spend the most time in them. That reasoning is still valid today. Rather than creating "dumping grounds," the school should explore alternative activities that are purposeful and of interest to students. A survey of available facilities and personnel, professional and volunteer, might suggest possibilities.

Building Level - Citizenship

1. The development of responsible citizenship should be a high priority concern of the school.

Citizenship has long been cited as a major goal in the philosophy of American schools. In practice, however, too little has been done to help students acquire the skills and attitudes necessary for effective participation in a democratic society. That which is everyone's responsibility becomes the obligation of no one, yet for optimum benefit, all teachers of every grade sought to share this challenging responsibility.

2. Responsible citizenship should be recognized by the school.

The majority of students in any school exhibit desirable patterns of behavior, yet prevailing attitudes and practices are usually focused on the small minority that does not. This inequity could be reduced if responsible students were given additional freedoms and privileges. These might include some system of "honor passes" and the setting up of a lounge area where these students might work or relax in a less supervised atmosphere.

3. A student council should be organized within the school.

It is unreasonable to assume that students will become good citizens if their experiences are limited to vicarious participation. An actively functioning student council, open to all grades, provides a real opportunity for students to plan, make decisions, and execute and evaluate their ideas. The council should concern itself with social, recreational, and service activities for the student body and serve as a forum and action group for student interests and needs.

4. A description of students rights should be formulated and placed in the student handbook.

Student handbooks typically contain extensive listings of student responsibilities, yet few, if any definitions of student rights. If we believe that rights and responsibilities exist in partnership, and that children do not waive their rights when they enter the schoolhouse door, then it becomes the duty of the school to inform students of their specific rights within the school community. Since there is a growth in maturity from grade six to grade eight, a graduated schedule might be considered.

Building Level - Instruction

1. Greater emphasis should be placed on individualizing instruction in both academic and non-academic courses of study.

Learning is an internal and highly specific experience for each individual, for which no "gross-grouping" system can adequately provide. Most subject areas now contained in the school curriculum could be restructured so as to include additional activities designed for individuals and small groups. Caution needs to be observed, however, so that the individual attention students require is not sacrificed. Learning packets are useful tools for specific purposes, but they should be regarded as only one of the possible alternatives which may be employed.

2. A tutorial program utilizing high school and middle school students should be organized.

It is common knowledge that peer approval becomes a strong and significant factor in the life of a student during the middle grade years. Too often the negative influence of the relationship is the one recognized by educators; too seldom is the constructive potential realized. Student tutors, from within and from without, can be remarkably effective teachers of other pupils in a wide variety of situations.

3. A tutorial and general volunteer program staffed by senior citizens should be initiated.

Retired persons in every community represent an almost unlimited resource of talent, interest, and time that could be tapped for the benefit of students, while simultaneously providing the senior citizens with an enriching and vitalizing experience. Coordination with the present volunteer program could be made. Transportation and lunch should be provided by the school district. The Takoma Park Middle School (Maryland) has found this a valuable addition to its program.

Building Level - Independent Study

1. Opportunities for independent study should be offered to all students who are able to accept the responsibility.

Many students could profit from exploratory investigations into topics which are of interest to them. These may originate within school-designated units of study or may be entirely unrelated to what is going on in the school. If we subscribe to the concept that independence in learning is a desirable goal, then both school and team need to supply time, resources, and guidance so that the study may proceed successfully. Beck Middle School (New Jersey) has an ambitious and successful program.

2. Greater utilization of community personnel and resources should be sought.

Communities have a vast reservoir of talents and facilities which can be used to enrich and extend the basic program of the school. Guests could be brought into the school to work with individuals or small groups, or the students could be transported to the facility for on-site instruction. Project L.E.A.R.N. of the Westport Connecticut, schools could be used as a pattern.

Building Level - Reporting to Parents

1. The school should be open to parent visitation at any time.

Parent cooperation is both desirable and indispensable to the successful functioning of the school and should be actively solicited by the staff. Informed parents tend to be supportive parents, and direct observation supplies the most accurate information. Closed doors lead to misunderstanding and distrust.

2. Parent conferences should be a part of the reporting system for all students.

Direct talks between parent and teacher are mutually beneficial, especially during the first part of the year, when an exchange of views and expectations is of optimum value to the student. Current procedures should be altered to require a conference with each parent prior to the end of the first report period. The remaining three reports would continue to be written, unless either teacher or parent preferred a conference.

3. In place of the one-evening open house in the fall, individual teams should schedule a series of similar experiences for parents during the team planning period.

Included might be such items as evaluation of completed units, introduction of new units, and common team concerns. Coffee and simple refreshments could be provided.

4. Grades, or symbols, used in reporting should be a measure of the learning done.

Deficiencies in study habits, while unquestionably of importance, should be noted and reported as a separate category. Otherwise, the grading process becomes an instrument of coercion rather than an indicator of achievement.

Building Level - Administration and Supervision

1. Regular informal meetings with parents and students should be initiated by the Principal.

Informal discussions between small groups of parents or students with the building Principal are mutually productive in terms of improved understanding and identification of potential problems. As much as possible the door to his office should be "open" to anyone needing his assistance.

2. A leadership team from within the staff should be formed.

Effective middle school leadership recognizes the value of staff involvement in decisions that affect the school. A representative group of teachers and other personnel could provide an input of ideas and feelings, as an advisory function to the Principal.

3. A possible revision of the supervisory structure should be considered.

In most of the observed middle grade schools, the direct supervision of teachers is an "in-house" responsibility, which seems to be a supportive commitment to middle school unity. Where team teaching is practiced, a single Director of Instruction, or similar position, seems to aid interdisciplinary efforts.

Supervisory evaluations should be expanded to include references to such recommended middle school practices as individualization, exploration, and student participation in planning.

4. Time to discuss middle school ideas and practices at faculty and department meetings should be scheduled.

Much has been happening in middle school education during recent years. Innovative and successful programs have developed within many areas. To stimulate thinking and action, a portion of existing school and department meetings should be set aside for this kind of sharing.

5. Leadership for a broadly diverse educational program should come from the administrative and supervisory staffs.

Because of their responsibility for the total school curriculum, administrators and supervisors exert considerable influence on the types and scope of activities that are offered. Too often in the present situation, the important exploratory aspects of middle school theory has not received sufficient stimulation and encouragement.

6. An annual evaluation of the school program should be conducted.

Unless deliberately sheduled into the life of the school, serious and penetrating examination of content and procedures tends not to occur. An on-going informal evaluation should culminate in a special day devoted to a more structured solicitation of reactions and suggestions from teachers, teams, departments, parents, and students. Areas of inadequacies could be pinpointed, as could items for future concentration.

7. Changes in student suspension practices should be made.

Suspension of students may afford "breathing time" for the school, but is often ineffective with chronic offenders. To substitute a more constructive action, in-school suspensions should be tried for a variety of infractions, including smoking.

8. All staff members should be responsible for student behavior.

Wide spread concern for student behavior has become apparent during recent months. To retain effective control of the school environment and to aid pupils in learning to live with established guidelines, it should become school policy that all staff members concern themselves with student attitudes and actions in all areas where adults are present.

Building Level - Teachers

1. To provide immediate impetus to the school evaluation study, as many staff members as possible should visit another school before the end of the present school year.

To extend one's perception of what good schools are about, nothing is as effective as direct observation. In the initial stages of our investigation, it will be advantageous to have some familiarity with practices in other schools. Since conference funds are probably not available at this time, it is recommended that staff members commit one personal leave day for this purpose.

2. Staff members interested in making changes in present programs need to commit themselves to leadership roles.

Implementation of changes within social institutions is seldom easy. Motivated individuals and groups, however, can accomplish much if they possess necessary determination and can concentrate their time and energies. Leadership must come from within the staff. No outside individual or organization can have the impact on the total program that the staff does.

3. Teachers need to expand their perception of their roles.

Several years ago the concept of the "whole child" was much in educational vogue and dialogue. In successful middle schools it continues to be the essence of the teachers' approach to their jobs. We need to see our responsibilities to students in a much wider context than simply as an instructor in a restrictive situation for a prescribed allotment of time.

4. An interdisciplinary learning experience for students should be planned.

Since the reorganization of the present middle school, teachers have been assigned to interdisciplinary teams. Relatively little interdisciplinary instruction has occurred, except for instances where two teachers have done so on their own initiative. To explore advantages and limitations inherent to this approach, each team should attempt one such "mini-unit" before the end of the school year.

5. To improve morale and mutual understanding among school personnel, numerous social and recreational activities should be planned for the entire adult staff.

People working together for common purposes need to know each other also as individuals. Much more needs to be done within schools to bring together secretaries, administrators, cafeteria help, supervisors, custodians, counselors, and teachers. Isolation of groups is not conducive to school unity and harmony.

Building Level - Curriculum

1. All curriculum areas should be examined critically during this evaluation period.

Unless consciously counteracted, subject area curricula become static and self-repeating. We need to weigh the potential value of each unit and activity to ascertain if each one should remain. Consideration also is required of grade level placements for units and skills retained, as well as for possible program additions deemed beneficial to students. To increase probability and frequency of interdisciplinary teaching, topics of common and related interests between subject areas need to be identified.

2. A developmental reading program available to all students should be developed.

The primary goal of the middle school instructional program is to help students acquire competencies in the basic learning skills, of which reading is the most fundamental. To insure the maximum possible growth for each child, formal reading instruction should be offered throughout the middle school years, concentrated most heavily in grade six, followed by decreasing exposure in grades seven and eight. Although the expectation is that every teacher is a teacher of reading, actual practice deviates widely from the stated principle.

3. The present exploratory arts program should be restructured and extended to include all grade levels.

Two basic tenets of middle school philosophy are that the school should offer a broad diversity of exploratory experiences and that students should have opportunities to select from a variety of options consistent with their interests. The related arts, including music, art, home economics, and industrial arts, offer an ideal means of achieving these dual purposes. Courses can be organized into four to five week components, from which students can make their choices. Schools currently offering this type of program usually allow fewer options for fifth and sixth graders.

4. An extensive program of mini-courses and club activities should be developed.

Children of the middle school age tend to have many and divergent interests and are receptive to activities that broaden their horizons. Such programs enable staff members and volunteers to share their talents and hobbies through satisfying relationships with students of all grade levels.

Building Level - Guidance

1. The focus of the guidance program should be redirected.

The emphasis in middle school guidance seems to be shifting from the traditional office counseling approach toward an environmental concept wherein the whole school is viewed as the guidance area. Counselors are out "where the action is," in classrooms, hallways and cafeteria, working with individuals and small groups on preventive and remedial programs. Career counseling is minimal and is usually reserved for the upper grade(s).

2. A values clarification program should be developed and made available to all students.

During the middle grade years, children are subjected to great stresses regarding their feelings and beliefs, as they pass from dependence on adult patterns toward the acquisition of their own permanent attitudes. The school, as a major societal agency, has the opportunity and the responsibility to help students gain basic values essestial to the well-being of the individual and of society itself. All teachers should contribute, but the leadership must come from the guidance professionals. Close cooperation with parents is essential.

3. A program of peer guidance should be instituted.

It is widely recognized that peer pressures are very real and very intense at this age, while the influence of both parent and teacher is declining. With adequate preparation, high school and middle school students can be very influential in assisting other pupils in their efforts to cope with school-related problems.

4. Whenever possible and feasible, students should be included in conferences between parent and counselor.

Since he/she is probably the reason for the conference, the student should be in attendance to hear the nature of the problem and to provide input from his point of view. Because his participation in the possible solution is indispensable, his involvement in its planning is desirable. Effective communication is strengthened because all participants have direct access to all information shared.

Building Level - Library

1. A comprehensive plan of library utilization should be formulated.

The library-media center occupies an integral niche in the education of middle graders, but only if there is agreement between the library staff and the rest of the faculty as to its role in the life of the school. The purposes and functioning of the center need to be cooperatively developed, if optimum benefit of the facility is to be realized.

2. Personnel needs should be determined based on the proposed total program.

The present staff is inadequate to conduct and supervise the range of activites offered by modern middle school media centers. In such schools, the library-media center is much more than a place to check out books. It provides extensive and varied print and non-print materials, has facilities for students to prepare and use audio-visual materials, and serves as the resource center for a far-ranging independent study program. One or more library-media specialists should be added.

3. Space needs should be analyzed.

Media centers contain a variety of spaces suitable for a diversity of activities. These include areas for quiet reading, study carrels, use of audio-visual materials, classroom space for group instruction, and rooms for small-group work. Some modification of the present structure is indicated.

4. Overnight loan of portable audio-visual equipment and materials should be considered.

Presently students have only limited access to the array of materials stocked in the library-media center. Film strips, tapes, and film loops could be used by students for recreational or exploratory purposes. Parent agreement would be required.

Building and District Level - Articulation

1. A district-wide committee should be established to coordinate articulation efforts between the three levels of schooling.

Because of differences in philosophy, personnel, and student needs, schools at each level develop characteristic attitudes and practices most appropriate to their purposes. These dissimilarities often pose difficulties for students as they attempt the transition from elementary through middle to high school, being especially pronounced where consecutive grades are housed in different buildings. A district committee, composed of representatives of the three school levels, curriculum supervisors, parents, and students could serve in an advisory capacity to promote communication and understanding and reduce potential problems for students.

IV. CONCLUSION

Good schools for middle grade youngsters do exist. Staffed by dedicated teachers and guided by resourceful and resolute administrators they provide diverse and challenging educational experiences for their students. Sadly, however, the number of students having access to such schools is probably still very small.

Despite the proliferation of middle schools during recent years, implementation of middle school theory has not kept pace. High school practices and procedures remain much in evidence, student needs and interests notwithstanding. Rationale for developing these schools has too often been for reasons other than educational. With strong leadership, a few such schools have been able to substantially alter their character.

Retrenchments in programs have occurred in a number of "pioneer" middle schools, and have affected such areas as team teaching, continuous progress learning, multi-age grouping, and use of open space class areas. Budget cuts have brought about some of these changes, but the real reasons seem to have been lack of commitment and inadequate re-training of teachers prior to the institution of these innovations. Renewed emphasis on the teaching of the basic skills is often stated.

A modern building, specifically planned to house middle school theory, in no way guarantees a successful school. Nor do plentiful supplies and equipment, generous expenditures of money, or favorable teacher-pupil ratios insure the quality of education. The essentials seem to be few: a committed staff possessing the vision to design, and the courage to carry out a program suited to the unique nature of middle grade youngsters.

More often than not the administrators and teachers involved have had previous elementary experience, suggesting that future direction in middle grades education should come from that level rather than from the high school. Only then can the school in the middle be truly a transitional institution with its own identity, incorporating within itself the best of both worlds.

V. APPENDIX

SCHOOLS VISITED

Connecticut

1. Bloomfield Middle School
2. Branford Middle School
3. Cider Mill School
4. Coleytown Junior High School
5. Middlebrook Junior High School
6. Wilson Junior High School

Maryland

1. Dunloggin Middle School
2. Farquhar Middle School
3. Hammond Middle School
4. Have de Grace Middle School
5. Takoma Park Middle School
6. Wilde Park Middle School

Massachusetts

1. Meadowbrook Junior High School
2. Rupert Nock Middle School
3. White Brook Middle School
4. Wildwood Elementary School

New Jersey

1. Beck Middle School

New York

1. Casey Middle School
2. Farnsworth Middle School
3. Fox Lane Middle School
4. French Road Middle School
5. Great Neck South Junior High School
6. Heim Middle School
7. Jamesville-DeWitt Middle School
8. Mill Middle School
9. Pine Grove Middle School
10. Twelve Corners Middle School

Pennsylvania

1. Boyce Middle School
2. Fort Couch Middle School
3. Rhodes Middle School
4. West Scranton Middle School

Rhode Island

1. Portsmouth Middle School

Virginia

1. Buford Middle School
2. George Mason Middle School
3. Godwin Middle School
4. Henderson Middle School
5. Henley Middle School
6. Prospect Middle School
7. Woodbridge Middle School

Special Conferences

1. Virginia Middle School Forum
2. New England League of Middle Schools
3. Innovations Day Program, Piedmont Technical College, South Carolina